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THE TERRORIST HOSTAGE ISSUE

ANNCR: THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY SOON--POSSIBLY NEXT WEEK--WELL ACT ON A PROPOSAL TO DEAL WITH THE PRACTICE OF INTERNATIONAL TERRORISTS OF TAKING AND VICTIMIZING INNOCENT HOSTAGES. NEWS ANALYST FRED GALVAN HAS THESE THOUGHTS:

VOICE: THE PROPOSAL BY WEST GERMANY IS SUPPORTED BY A GROWING NUMBER OF DELEGATIONS--INCLUDING THE UNITED STATES-- AND IS NOW IN COMMITTEE. BUT WITH THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY'S SCHEDULED ADJOURNMENT DATE OF DECEMBER TWENTY-FIRST RAPIDLY APPROACHING, THE ASSEMBLY IS EXPECTED TO ACT ON THE WEST GERMAN INITIATIVE SOON. IN ESSENCE, THE IDEA IS TO CREATE A SPECIAL U.N. COMMITTEE TO DRAFT A CONVENTION PRESCRIBING SEVERE PUNISHMENT FOR TERRORISTS WHO TAKE HOSTAGES AS A CONDITION FOR GOVERNMENTS TO ACCEDE TO THEIR DEMANDS.

THAT THERE IS AN URGENT NEED FOR SUCH A CONVENTION IS CONFIRMED BY HEADLINES IN NEWSPAPERS AROUND THE WORLD IN RECENT YEARS. IN THE YEAR ENDING LAST OCTOBER (1976), THERE WERE ELEVEN HIJACKINGS OF AIRLINERS AND THEIR PASSENGERS AND CREWS, NINETEEN OTHER CASES OF KIDNAPPINGS, MORE THAN FORTY ARMED ATTACKS ON DEFENSELESS PERSONS, AIRPORTS AND VILLAGES, AND MORE THAN ONE HUNDRED BOMBINGS.

THESE ACTS BY TERRORISTS IN LATIN AMERICA, THE MIDDLE EAST, AFRICA AND OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD TOOK A HEAVY TOLL IN INNOCENT VICTIMS. MORE THAN SEVENTY PEOPLE LOST THEIR LIVES, AND MORE THAN TWO HUNDRED WERE INJURED. AND OF COURSE THE TERRORIST ACTS CAUSED UNTOLD ANGUISH TO THE FAMILIES OF THE VICTIMS AND TO HOSTAGES WHO WERE ABLE TO ESCAPE WITH THEIR LIVES. THE TARGETS OF TERRORISM HAVE INCLUDED A WIDE RANGE OF PEOPLE -- DIPLOMATS ON POST, BUSINESSMEN, PERSONS EN ROUTE TO VISIT THEIR FAMILIES, AND EVEN SCHOOL CHILDREN AND INFANTS.

IT IS THESE CIRCUMSTANCES THAT APPEAR TO HAVE FINALLY AWAKENED THE CONSCIENCE OF THE NATIONS ATTENDING THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY. HITHERTO, THERE HAS BEEN SOME SENTIMENT AMONG THIRD-WORLD NATIONS AGAINST ANY SWEEPING ANTI-TERRORIST MEASURES BY THE WORLD BODY. THE BONN GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSAL IS DESIGNED TO MEET THOSE OBJECTIONS BY FOCUSSING ON A SPECIFIC ASPECT OF THE OVER-ALL TERRORIST PROBLEM.

IN SUPPORT OF THE PROPOSAL, THE UNITED STATES ARGUED FORCEFULLY IN COMMITTEE, THAT BEYOND HUMANITARIAN CONSIDERATIONS THAT CONDEMN THE TAKING OF HOSTAGES, SUCH ACTS ACTUALLY CONSTITUTE POTENTIAL THREATS TO INTERNATIONAL PEACE. (OPT) A CASE IN POINT, OF COURSE, IS, THE RESCUE SOME MONTHS AGO OF ISRAELI HOSTAGES AT ENTEBBE AIRPORT IN UGANDA BY ISRAELI COMMANDOS (END OPT). MOREOVER, AS THE AMERICAN DELEGATE NOTED, ALL U.N. MEMBERS ARE COMMITTED TO THE PRINCIPLES OF THE U.N. CHARTER WHICH, ALONG WITH THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS, RECOGNIZES THE DIGNITY AND WORTH OF ALL PERSONS.

THESE ARE POWERFUL ARGUMENTS ECHOED BY OTHER DELEGATIONS AT THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY--EVEN THOSE REPRESENTING GOVERNMENTS FORMERLY RELUCTANT TO DEAL WITH THE HOSTAGE ISSUE. IT IS THIS CHANGE IN CLIMATE THAT JUSTIFIES HOPES THAT THE ASSEMBLY WILL ACT POSITIVELY ON THE WEST GERMAN PROPOSAL BEFORE IT ADJOURNS. AND, FURTHER, THAT THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE WILL PRODUCE A WORKABLE CONVENTION FOR CONSIDERATION BY NEXT YEAR'S ASSEMBLY. ANYTHING ELSE WOULD DISAPPOINT THE HOPES OF MILLIONS AROUND THE WORLD WHO WANT TO ENJOY WITHOUT FEAR THEIR UNIVERSALLY-RECOGNIZED RIGHTS TO WORK AND TRAVEL IN PEACE.

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